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**Consultation: New Secondary School for Kingston  
Learning and Children's Services  
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**24 February 2010**

**Consultation: New Secondary School for Kingston**

**Please find enclosed the response to this consultation from the governors of Grey Court School.**

## Response to the consultation on a proposed new school in North Kingston

### Introduction

This paper presents the views of the Governing Body of Grey Court School on the proposal for new secondary school in North Kingston, as set out in the recent consultation document. As the closest non-selective secondary school to the proposed new school site, and as the school that currently serves the area in question, the impact of the proposal on Grey Court would be significant. Accordingly, we expect that the local authority in Kingston upon Thames will give clear prominence to our response in the analysis and decision making process.

### A new school for North Kingston

In terms of pupil numbers in both Kingston and Richmond, there is clearly an increase in secondary age pupils expected in the medium term, and additional school places will be needed to meet this demand. A new school in the Borough of Kingston is therefore necessary and will contribute to meeting the needs of secondary age pupils across the two boroughs. We also appreciate that a new school would give parents additional choice, and that choice can bring benefits for the schools, parents and pupils in both Richmond and Kingston boroughs.

### Concern over the proposed size

Our main concern relates to the size of the proposed school and the impact on other secondary provision in the area in the short, medium and long term.

- In the **short term**, both Richmond and Kingston authorities are reliant on Grey Court to meet rising demand. Grey Court has not had significant capital investment for many years. In spite of this, the school has increased substantially in popularity and standards continue to improve. Investment is needed to enable the infrastructure to cope with higher numbers in the years between 2010 and 2015.
- In the **medium term**, we have concerns about the impact on Grey Court if eight forms of entry are provided by the new school. We note that the estimates quoted in the consultation document relate to the whole of the Borough, with no specific analysis of North Kingston numbers. It is impossible to say, therefore, whether eight forms of entry on a single (small) site will be too many to serve the North Kingston area without further detailed analysis of this particular locality. An over-provision of places so near to Grey Court is likely to result in neither school being full and therefore both being inefficient.
- In the **long term** we are concerned about future demographic trends. In the same way that Kingston, along with other London Boroughs, failed to predict and adequately prepare for the rise in demand for

primary school places, the Borough cannot with confidence know how long the pupil bulge will last or at what level it will peak. We note that the projections in the consultation document assume a rising level of retention of learners (both from birth to Y7 and from Reception to Y7) and also imply that the current high birth rate will continue indefinitely. Both of these assumptions may of course prove to be true but our concern relates to what happens when the pupil numbers drop again.

### **The best solution for local parents and pupils**

All of the above lead us to believe that the best solution for local parents and pupils is for the two Boroughs to work together to provide the appropriate number of new places, as well as to invest in existing provision, ie. Grey Court. This would enable real choice to be provided to the local community and ensure good value for money whereby places are not over-provided for in the medium and long term.

### **Concern over the issue of the inequality of the sites**

The proposed new school would be overcrowded, with almost 1700 pupils sharing a very small site. Grey Court School is on a 23-acre site that could accommodate additional pupils should investment be made in the buildings.

There is a straightforward value for money argument here: funding could be better spent by adding additional forms of entry to an existing school with an extensive site rather than simply providing new infrastructure. It would be a shame if local government boundaries led to inappropriate expenditure and the provision of too many places.

### **Collaboration**

Governors have read the consultation document with interest. The document mentions in several places collaboration between the local authority in Kingston and Grey Court School. This has not been our experience. To date, the only communication between Grey Court's Governors and headteacher and the authority in Kingston has been initiated by the school.

The consultation document is misleading in this regard. It should not have implied collaboration or support for the proposal from Grey Court School. Regrettably there is no existing strong relationship, which is good practice, and becomes essential in the context of the introduction of the proposed new school.

Furthermore, past discussions relating to Grey Court being involved in the Kingston BSF programme have not been honoured. Grey Court governors are therefore unsure about the nature and commitment to future collaboration.

### **Consultation process**

The document sent to local residents unfortunately uses the word "will" instead of "would" throughout encouraging the reader to assume that the new school will go ahead. We gather that the new school is subject to the statutory new school process, planning regulations and that BSF funding is not yet completely

guaranteed, especially in light of a potential change of Government. The consultation document is therefore surprisingly misleading.

To repeat: we have received a copy of the consultation document, but have had no other approach from officers or councillors.

### **Conclusion**

While we agree that additional places are needed in the area, we feel that to introduce an eight-forms-of-entry secondary school in North Kingston leads to an unbalanced solution. The lack of detail and other shortcomings in the projection numbers make it impossible for us to be confident that the impact on Grey Court will not be significant. Given issues such as the differences in the two sites concerned and the lack of investment in our school our view is that the new school, if it goes ahead, will create a real imbalance in provision for the young people of this area and an inefficient use of resources.

Finally, given the commitment in the consultation document to extensive collaboration between the Kingston local authority and our school, we would have liked to have been properly consulted over the proposals in order for us to have confidence in stated intentions to work to solve these cross-borough issues.

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